

REMARKS

Applicants request favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application in view of the preceding amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 28, 29, 33, 34, and 38-55 are presented for consideration, with Claims 28, 33, 42, and 51 being independent. Claims 28, 33, 40, 46-48, 52, and 53 have been amended to clarify features of the subject invention. No new matter has been added by these changes.

Initially, Applicants' attorney gratefully acknowledges the courtesies extended to her by the Examiner in conducting a personal interview on April 15, 2003 and a follow-up telephonic interview on April 21, 2003. In the personal interview, Applicants' attorney presented arguments distinguishing the claimed invention over the cited art. In particular, Applicants' attorney asserted that U.S. Patent 5,424,552 (Tsuji, et al.) and U.S. Patent No. 5,754,340 (Ushida et al.), both cited in the December 2, 2002 Official Action, fail to disclose or suggest at least the feature of an optical element deformed by the weight thereof. The Examiner disagreed and asserted that the reticle in the Tsuji, et al. patent can be read as the optical element recited in independent claims 28, 33, 42, and 51. Applicants do not concede the propriety of the Examiner's contention.

In the telephonic interview, the Applicant's attorney proposed amending the independent claims and the relevant dependent claims such that the term "optical element" is changed to "optical lens element," in an effort to expedite allowance of this application. The Examiner indicated that the proposed amendments overcome the Tsuji, et al. patent, but may require further consideration and search.

Accordingly, Applicants submit that independent claims 28, 33, 42, and 51 are allowable over the cited art for the reasons discussed in the personal and telephonic interviews. In particular, Applicants submit that the Tsuji, et al. patent and the Ushida et al. patent both fail to disclose or suggest an optical lens element, which is deformed by the weight thereof, in the manner of the present invention recited in the independent claims.

Moreover, Applicants submit that the Ushida et al. patent is silent regarding the possibility of deformation of an optical lens element due to the weight thereof. As such, that patent does not disclose or suggest a method of preventing deterioration of optical performance caused by that phenomenon.

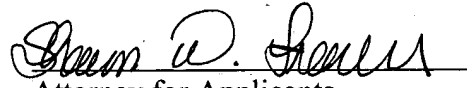
For the foregoing reasons, Applicants submit that the present invention, as recited in independent claims 28, 33, 42, and 51, is patentably defined over the cited art whether that art is taken individually, or in combination.

The dependent claims also should be deemed allowable, in their own right, for defining other patentable features of the present invention in addition to those recited in their respective independent claims. Individual consideration of these dependent claims is requested.

Applicants further submit that the instant application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the rejections set forth in the above-noted Official Action and an early Notice of Allowance are requested.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Shawn W. Fraser", written over a horizontal line.

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